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ABSTRACT

A discussion of multimedia teaching techniques for second language instruction looks at the current state of educational technology for college-level Chinese language teaching, then focuses on practices for teaching Chinese at Smith College (Massachusetts). Truly multimedia materials, which use computer software, compact discs, video, slides, and overhead projection in various combinations, are found only for pronunciation instruction and intermediate-to-advanced reading instruction. At Smith College, the guiding principle for multimedia use is to increase exposure to the Chinese language environment, contributing to more efficient use of class time. Students are assigned work in the language laboratory or dorm (with computer link to the campus network). Pronunciation materials have been found effective here. Assignments are given and grammar notes are summarized on a class home page, particularly useful for students in the five-college consortium who live off campus. Student reading of texts is recorded in the lab, with teacher feedback provided on computer. More advanced readings will have to be developed because edited materials already on the Internet are limited. Despite its advantages, multimedia technology has two drawbacks: it can consume too much student time, and can not replace oral language or character-writing practice. Also the issue of standardization must be addressed. (MSE)

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Multimedia Teaching in Chinese Courses: Practices and Suggestions

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for
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A wave is engulfing Chinese language teaching, a wave of multimedia technology. During the past few years, computer softwares, CDs and other multimedia programs specially designed for Chinese language teaching have come out thick and fast. More and more instructors and professionals have been or are going to be involved in the use, design and development of multimedia technology for the teaching of Chinese. This trend is perhaps no where more evidenced than in this conference where, of the 34 panels, 6 are entirely devoted tc the discussion of multimedia technology in classrooms, accounting for a high 17.6% of the total number. And of the 98 papers presented or to be presented altogether in this conference, 16 are about computer-assisted teaching for Chinese, again a 16% of the total number. The wave of the multimedia technology has come with such a momentum and with such a force that during one of the regional conferences early this year on Chinese language instruction that I attended, a panelist boldly put forward a proposal for a radical approach to the teaching of Chinese characters--using computer instead of a pen to teach and to write Chinese characters and hence totally eliminating handwriting in the initial stage of learning Chinese. Whether or not this is feasible or recommendable, there seem to have been more introductions than assessment of the situation in the face of this drive for integration of multimedia technology with teaching curriculum. In view of this, the present paper attempts to weigh upon a few approaches based on our own practices so as to offer a modest proposal. Since I am going to use the term multimedia frequently in the following, let me better define the term "multimedia" at the outset. I take the word to denote not only computer softwares and CDs, but also the use of video, slides as well as overhead projector equipment. By

this definition, therefore, any teaching via the use of various media will be considered as multimedia teaching in my paper.

Before we embark on our assessment of any method, it is necessary to take a look at the current situation in general in the field to see the depth and the scope with which it has been used. Limited by space and by my own observation, I can only briefly map out what are available there. There are, as I see it, the following areas of application:

1. Pronunciation. Currently there are two computer softwares developed for this purpose. HyperChinese is a program designed to help students with their learning and distinguishing various Chinese sounds. Students learn each sound through voice demonstration, imitation and comparison. There are also quizzes to check their progress. Another program is a commercial CD called "Professional Interactive Chinese for Windows with Speech Recognition" which according to its explanation has the added advantage of showing mouth and tongue positions through animated visual displays. Hence it can place the user in the context of particular scenes for visual as well as audio guidance.

2. For intermediate and/or advanced reading class. This group seems the most fortunate since the majority of the programs and softwares are designed for them. Besides *Chinese Breakthrough*, a set of audio-visual programs for TV and newspaper reading, and *WinCalis* with Chinese/Japanese version, a very useful programming tool for designing various Chinese exercises, there are also quite a number of electronic materials on the Internet that some instructors have made use of in their curriculum.

3. There are also some miscellaneous multimedia materials in the instruction of Chinese at various institutions, which are more geared to their curricula. So far as I know UC Santa Barbara, College of Holy Cross, US Military Academy at West Point and some other institutions have developed their own softwares for their students. They introduced their results in last year's CLTA conference.

Having surveyed the field in general, let me shift my focus in the following to our own practice at Smith College in terms of incorporating multimedia devices into our teaching curriculum.

From the outset, our guiding principle in using the multimedia technology is to increase students' exposure to Chinese environment, to enhance their understanding of materials in Chinese outside of class so that there will be more efficient use of very limited class time. To ensure all this, we have allocated a lot of work for the students to do outside the class in the lab or in their dorm, if they have a computer linked with the campus network. During the initial period of pronunciation, we have used HyperChinese Pronunciation CD-ROM to give students plenty of time to practice on their own in the lab. I monitored their progress by asking them to turn in their score sheets for quiz everyday and to check their pronunciation in class. The result is pleasing: students learn to pronoun and distinguish various sounds in the lab, and in class they have the chance to see if their knowledge about *pinyin* and their pronunciation can stand the test by the instructor, for I give oral quiz everyday in class, too. In less than two weeks, almost every student has learned to pronounce every sound fairly accurately. This is an intensive

training of pronunciation and the result certainly need to be consolidated later on by continued checks and corrections of students' pronunciation by the instructor.

For students's grasp of Chinese basic sentence patterns and the basic grammar, I have summarized grammar notes for each lesson, which I put on my home page, so that students can get access to them any time anywhere on campus, even off campus where they spent their vacation. This, too, has proven to be particularly efficient and welcome to students who live far. For Smith College is a member of the Five-College consortium in the Pioneer Valley area and it admits students from any of the other colleges nearby. With this Internet access, students from those schools do not have to come to Smith to get the information they need. This long-distance relay of information is useful also for giving out assignments as well. I generally give one dictation each week. In order to save time in class, I put my dictation on my home page and ask my students to do it any time over the week but turn in their work the first day of the following week. In this way, students of other schools can do it on their own campuses so long as they have an access to WWW and its sound file. We also ask our students to record their reading of the text in the lab as a means of checking their progress in pronunciation and intonation. I check their reading and give my comments once a week in my office through the computer network. For the advanced class of literature in Chinese, so far I have not seen any good edited electronic materials other than some literary texts contained in the materials mentioned in the above category. There are, however, a whole lot of unedited materials on the Internet. The problem that an instructor faces is how to make use of this vast library to fit the needs of his or her own class. I will be teaching an advanced literature course in the

spring semester and I have tentatively planned to ask students to speed-read one short essay on the Internet each week and write his or her report as both an exercise for comprehending more recent pieces of literature and an opportunity for writing. My purpose is to get students familiarized with the literature on the Internet and to learn how to use the information available. Since those materials are unedited and with varying degrees of difficulty, I myself will at the beginning select a few pieces for the students with the hope that they will be able to choose materials suitable for their own reading later.

With the survey of the field in general and a brief introduction to our local practice, I would like to proceed to an analysis of the problems and to offer some suggestions in the use of multimedia technology in teaching Chinese.

What are the real advantages of incorporating multimedia technology in our teaching? I think, first, teaching softwares and Internet programs function as a very patient tutor, who can instruct the students at any time for no matter how long a time that the student himself/herself can afford. And secondly, because of their patience, they can guide and lead students with their mechanical drills. Knowing these features, I have allocated quite a number of exercises--mechanical ones like pattern drills, sound discrimination and dictation for the computer to assist while in class I just check students' familiarity of the course contents and to organize the oral activities. Experience has told me that this can indeed greatly enhance our teaching effect, since a lot of activities that originally would have been done in class have been carried out by students themselves outside the class. In other words, students have a lot more to do in addition to their daily

class activities. This has both advantage and disadvantage, advantage because the instructor can have more to teach in class and can therefore achieve better teaching effect; disadvantage because we may have used too much of students' time and that can backfire. I tend to think that multimedia language assignment need also to have a limit on its consumption of students' time. If we use too much of their time, although with good intention, it may bring result contrary to our expectation. Once as I designed too much of the computer exercises for students to do, their interest and energy were quickly worn down so much so that what they finally came up with, under my strict policy, were some jobs perfunctorily done and some of them simply did not finish. This made me to reconsider my whole plan. In applying the multimedia technology, we do gain a lot of class time, but this should not be at the sacrifice of more student's time out of class. At present, so far as I know, limited by funding or technology, most instructors of Chinese are still unable to use computer often in their classrooms. That means the interesting and stimulating programs that we have designed would mainly be accessed by students out of class and that involves their extra time. Whether this is worthwhile or are there any better solutions, I think those are the issues that every instructor should be aware of in face of the multimedia trend in teaching.

Secondly, there is no doubt that multimedia technology makes the learning of Chinese much fun. However, technology is after all technology, which can not replace the art of language teaching, especially for such components as oral dialogues and writing. Much as some students may be addicted to the use of computer and its magic, I would always remind them of the necessity of practicing oral and written exercises on their own.

In teaching an advanced reading class, for example, in addition to the requirement of a composition by computer, I also asked students to turn in a hand-written version just as an exercise for character writing.

Thirdly, as I introduced in the beginning, there are currently quite a lot of teaching softwares for use in classrooms, each with its own specific features suited for a specific group of learners. In actually using these softwares, however, one often has the following dilemma: on the one hand, the more the program is specifically tailored to the teaching curriculum, the textbook as well as the pace and structure of the course, the better it serves the needs of the course. Many of the softwares recently developed, so far as I know, were based on certain textbook(s) or other teaching materials used in certain institutions. Maximum result can therefore be obtained only by using the textbooks themselves. On the other hand, however, if the same program or software is to be popularized and to play a greater role in the filed of Chinese language teaching, that perhaps requires the generality of the software or program, which means the software or the program had better be designed at certain generic level so that more people and more schools can use it for their own purposes. But then, as I said before, the more generic the program, the less effective in its application to the curriculum. This is exactly the situation that we have encountered in our use of some of the programs in our classroom. And this is what I would call the dilemma between the specificity and the generality of multimedia programs. As multimedia teaching is to become more and more popular, I think more and more schools and instructors may face the same situation. This is in the

final analysis an issue of standardization, for which I do not have a ready solution here and which I would like to pose to you the audience for your consideration.

Finally, some words or hope for the developers and designers of computer programs and softwares. So far the programs that we have seen seem to be mostly, if not all, still at the category of passive teaching aids, that is, they are still mainly limited in the areas of amplifying explanations, enriching annotations or providing contexts or situations in various dimensions for texts that students study. This is of course convenient for the learners. However, they are, I tend to think, still playing the role of a TA. Could we make the multimedia technology more interactive in our teaching so that it can play the role of half a teacher, who can engage students' attention, diagnose their weaknesses in their studies based on their exercises on the program and hence provide advice or strategies for further improvement? This may sound utopian at the present, but so far as I know there have been some attempts being made in this direction. With the rapid development of computer technology in the areas of voice recognition and artificial intelligence together with the efforts and wisdom of our instructors, more and better accomplishments will and can be made in time.

In conclusion, the wave of multimedia teaching is rapidly becoming a trend in the field of Chinese instruction. Although there may still be some problems, some of which I explained above, I think sooner or later they will be overcome and the technology will be better integrated into our teaching. However, better and more fruitful results can only come from a prepared mind.